
Government of the District of Columbia



Metropolitan Police Department

Testimony of
Charles H. Ramsey
Chief of Police

***“Oversight Hearing on the District of Columbia
Public School System (DCPS)”***

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform
Honorable Tom Davis, Chairman

May 20, 2005

Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2154
Washington, DC

Mister Chairman, Congresswoman Norton, other members of the Committee, staff and guests ... thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on a topic of vital importance to the District of Columbia, to our young people and their families – indeed, to our entire city and its future. That topic is the safety of our public schools.

Mayor Anthony Williams, City Administrator Robert Bobb and other members of the District government are to be applauded for their commitment and leadership on the issues of juvenile crime and school safety. The Mayor, in particular, has worked hard to raise awareness of the issue, to develop programs that are supported by budgeted funds, to pursue legislation that assists the police in our enforcement and intervention efforts, and to insist that all agencies involved in the safety of our young people are working together and in a coordinated manner.

Today's hearing comes at a critically important time in the District's ongoing efforts to enhance the safety of our schools. Recent legislation passed by the DC Council and signed by the Mayor transfers management responsibility for school safety from the DC Public Schools to the MPD, effective July 1. Under this transfer of responsibility, the District will continue to use contract security personnel, along with MPD School Resource Officers, to provide safety services in our schools. What is changing is that the MPD will now oversee management of the security contract and performance of the private security personnel in the schools.

The results, we believe, will be a better-trained, higher-quality school safety workforce; greater coordination among private security, MPD personnel, and school staff; and, ultimately, safer schools for our students, faculty, staff and parents. Of course, with this new responsibility also come the expectation and the opportunity for the police and the schools to work more closely on a range of issues that impact the safety of our young people, in the schools and in the community. The MPD stands ready to meet those expectations and take advantage of those opportunities.

* * * * *

The new school security contract is the result of a cooperative effort among the MPD, DCPS and the DC Office of Contracting and Procurement. Together, we developed a comprehensive RFP and completed a thorough evaluation of the offerors who responded. The proposed new contract has been presented to the DC Council for approval. The contract is noteworthy because it sets standards for the selection and training of school security personnel. It establishes integrity and performance standards for personnel (including regular drug testing of employees). And it provides for strict and regular auditing of the contractor's performance in meeting the provisions of the contract. These are all critically important reforms that will go a long way toward improving the quality of security services and the sense of safety in our schools.

Even before the legislation on school security was enacted, the MPD took a number of steps to enhance school safety using the resources at our disposal. For example, the MPD created a new Office of Security Services, headed by an assistant chief, to help plan and oversee the transfer of school safety (as well as other security responsibilities) to the MPD. In addition, our Department substantially increased the number of School Resource Officers this school year, to 99 officers and

14 supervisors. Based on a risk analysis the MPD conducted, SROs have been assigned to middle, junior and senior high schools throughout the District. All of these schools have at least one SRO; those deemed to be at the highest risk have several officers.

School Resource Officers and their sergeants not only provide a uniformed police presence during school hours and after-school events; they also facilitate critical coordination with the neighborhood patrol officers in the communities where schools are located. From the tragic shooting death of James Richardson inside Ballou Senior High School 15 months ago to any number of other incidents of school violence, we know that crime problems in our neighborhoods often end up in our schools – and vice versa. The MPD is working hard to prevent this spill-over of crime between schools and neighborhoods by fully integrating school safety into our broader strategy of community policing, what we call “Policing for Prevention.”

School Resource Officers and sergeants are detailed to the police districts where the schools are located. This places them in the same chain of command as neighborhood patrol officers, and provides them with access to the same information and resources about crime in the community. The sergeants help ensure that patrol officers working in the vicinity of the school pay attention to the area around the school and share information and coordinate efforts with the SROs assigned to the schools. School safety is included in the broader crime prevention plans that are developed by the various Police Service Areas (or PSAs). Regional Assistant Chiefs, District Commanders and PSA lieutenants are all encouraged to develop relationships with the schools in their areas of command. And anytime a Principal has an issue about a neighborhood crime or disorder problem that impacts the safety of students and staff, he or she is encouraged to contact the Commander of the Police District where the school is located. So coordination between school safety and neighborhood safety is a critical element of our overall strategy.

* * * * *

The Committee asked that I provide data on the nature and extent of crime in our schools. Based on our data, there were at least 522 serious (or “Index”) crimes reported on DC Public School property during calendar year 2004. That compares with an estimated 510 such crimes in 2003, for an increase of about 2 percent. It should be noted that the vast majority of these crimes – about 73 percent in 2004 – were property offenses such as thefts, thefts from autos and stolen vehicles. While the more serious crimes of violence – robberies, assaults and even homicides – occur less frequently in our schools, there were still 139 violent crimes reported on school property during 2004. That is an increase from 117 in 2003. So far this year, the number of crimes reported at DC Public Schools has declined 18 percent, when compared with the same period of 2004. So we are encouraged that some of the steps we have already taken to combat school crime may be having an impact.

As the MPD assumes management responsibility for school safety, we will continue to emphasize data collection and analysis. This will help us in deploying our resources – both School Resource Officers and contract security personnel – in the most effective manner possible.

In the community at large, juvenile involvement in crime – both as offenders and as victims – remains a serious concern in the District of Columbia, although there may be some encouraging trends that are emerging here as well. During 2004, there were 24 juveniles murdered in DC. That is nearly double the number of juvenile homicide victims in 2003, when there were 13, and is 41 percent higher than the 2002 total of 17. So far this year, there have been five juvenile homicide victims, down from 13 such victims at this time last year. We are hopeful that last year's spike in juvenile homicides was a one-year aberration, not a statistical trend.

What is most perplexing about the 2004 increase in juvenile homicides was that it came during a year in which the total number of homicides in the District declined by 20 percent, to its lowest level in 18 years. In 2003, about 5 percent of all homicide victims in our city were juveniles, but in 2004, the figure was 12 percent – about one out of every eight homicide victims last year was age 17 or younger. A report analyzing all juvenile homicides between 2002 and 2004 – including information about victims, offenders, methods, location, time and other factors – has been made available to the Committee and is posted on the MPD website as well.

During 2004, MPD officers arrested approximately 2,950 juveniles for a variety of crimes – from homicide, robbery and weapons violations to various misdemeanor offenses. The 2004 arrest total is approximately 15 percent higher than the 2003 total, and almost 22 percent higher than the 2002 total. So far this year, officers have made just over 1,000 juvenile arrests, which represents a slight decrease from the 2004 total but still reflects the enhanced attention we are paying to juvenile crime.

It is difficult to know whether recent increases in juvenile arrest activity are the result of more crime committed by young people or more vigorous enforcement by the police – or some combination of factors. It is interesting to note that as arrests of *adults* increased 14 percent last year, overall crime in DC declined by 18 percent. I can tell the Committee that our Department has placed increased attention on juvenile crime in the last few years, particularly on such “gateway” crimes as unauthorized use of a vehicle, narcotics and burglary. And we are hopeful that this increased attention to offenses committed by juveniles will have a positive impact on juvenile crime trends.

We have also substantially increased our enforcement of truancy and curfew laws, as well as our investigations of child abuse. Over the past 17 months, MPD officers have picked up more than 4,300 truants, including approximately 1,200 since the beginning of this calendar year. Curfew violations increased from only about 230 in 2003 to more than 1,200 in 2004 and approximately 800 so far this year already. And the number of newly reported cases of child abuse investigated by the MPD increased by more than 50 percent between 2003 (1,088 cases) and 2004 (1,672 cases), and this number continued to rise during the first quarter of 2005. These statistics provide further evidence of our Department's commitment to reducing juvenile crime – both victimization and offending – and to intervening early in the cycle of crime by investigating child abuse.

* * * * *

When it comes to combating juvenile crime, enforcement of the law is critically important. But it is also clear that it will take much more than just law enforcement to address the problem in a

meaningful and lasting way. That is why the MPD is actively involved with other agencies in a variety of intervention and prevention programs targeting juvenile crime inside our schools and in the community at large. Allow me to provide you just a few examples.

Conflict Resolution Teams from the MPD's Office of Youth Violence Prevention visit schools on a regular basis – both to solicit information about emerging conflicts and to mediate those disagreements before they escalate. These teams were particularly active in the aftermath of the James Richardson shooting at Ballou. Organizationally, we are moving the Office of Youth Violence Prevention into the Office of Security Services so that our school enforcement, intervention and prevention efforts can be consolidated and better coordinated under one chain of command.

Our Department also works closely with the Alliance of Concerned Men on conflict resolution activities, and we have partnered with the East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership on a number of initiatives to address the underlying causes of youth violence. For example, our two organizations, along with the Department of Parks and Recreation's Roving Leaders and the DC Public Schools, recently collaborated on the "Girlfriend to Girlfriend" summit involving more than 160 young women from 10 major female gangs. In Northwest DC, the multi-agency Gang Intervention Partnership we created almost two years ago, in response to a spike in gang violence involving Latino youth, has been very successful in combating that serious problem. And the MPD remains actively involved in other citywide initiatives, including the Child Fatality Review Committee and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council's Truancy Working Group, among others.

The MPD is also leading a number of our own prevention and intervention initiatives. These include our Youth Advisory Councils, "40 Days of Increased Peace," Metropolitan Police Boys and Girls Clubs, the "DC Fashion Idol" program that is currently under way, late-night basketball and football, and numerous ongoing and ad hoc efforts in all seven police districts. The important point is that these are not simply "feel-good" initiatives, but rather aggressive and creative approaches to combating youth crime and violence on many levels – and with many different partners.

The MPD is also working with the Mayor's Office and the DC Council on legislation that will give our Department and others the tools we need to address juvenile crime and violence. Last year, the Council passed the Mayor's juvenile justice legislation that holds juveniles and, in many cases, their parents more accountable. This year, the Mayor's omnibus crime legislation includes a number of important provisions dealing with juveniles, including measures on gang recruitment, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. Our Department looks forward to testifying on behalf of this legislation before the DC Council and, ultimately, to carrying out these and other important provisions of the proposed law.

* * * * *

Earlier in my testimony, I mentioned the February 2004 murder of James Richardson inside Ballou High School, at the hands of a fellow student. That incident sparked a level of anger and frustration in the community that I have rarely witnessed in my 34-plus years as a police officer. In the aftermath of that tragic murder, Ballou students, parents, faculty and staff, as well as the community

at large, demanded answers and demanded action. Our city and our Department responded with a number of initiatives that I have touched upon today – actions that are designed to enhance safety and promote learning not just at Ballou in the short term, but at all of our public schools for the long term.

But as much as the community may want a “quick fix” to the problem of school crime, the fact remains that school safety is a complex issue that demands thoughtful, careful and comprehensive solutions. School safety involves much more than guards and metal detectors at the door and cameras in the hallways. Creating a safe and positive school environment – one that is free of drugs, violence, intimidation and fear – encompasses a wide range of physical, social and academic factors that involve a number of different agencies and individuals. Coordinating these myriad activities – and getting everyone working together – is essential to our success. The Metropolitan Police Department is committed to this goal, and we stand ready to continue working with other agencies and individuals to help make our schools safer.

Thank you.